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A

BRIEF TREATISE

ON

DEATH,

PHILOSOPHICALLY, MORALLY,

AND

PRACTICALLY, CONSIDERED.

By Robert Fellowes, A.M. Oxon.

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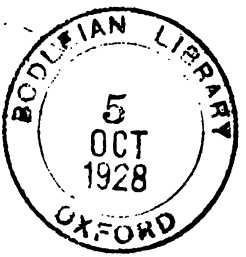
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To the Memory of
The Lady HARRIET FITZROY,
who,
To a meek and quiet spirit,
added
All the tasteful and elegant accomplishments,
Which refine and embellish
The female character;—
who,
In a long course of sickness and of suffering,
Exhibited a pattern of the most
Submissive resignation;—
who,
Practised all the softer virtues
In her life,
And who discovered the animating hope
Of Immortality
In her death;—
These pages are inscribed,
By the Author.

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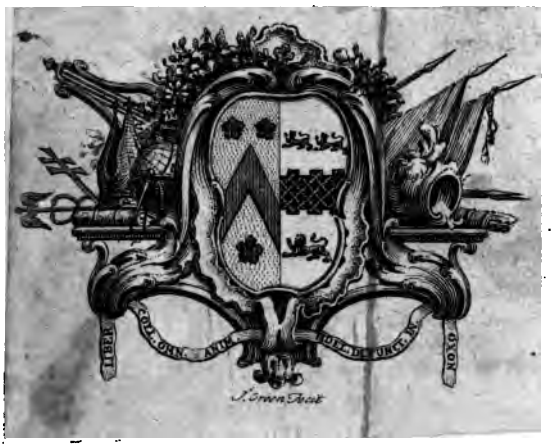

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DEATH,

Philosophically, Theologically, and Practically, considered.

PART I.

NO truth is more often pronounced or more generally acknowledged than this, that "life is short."—It is a truth, which is inculcated by every day's experience; and which, notwithstanding all our thoughtlessness, the vicissitudes of life will not suffer us to forget.

The frame of man is made of perishable materials. It is a subtle and delicate piece of mechanism, admirably contrived; but which, like other me-

chanical contrivances, wears with use, and must finally be destroyed by time. The animal fibre, while it is in a state of life, is in perpetual activity; the motions of the heart and arteries are never still; and the moment they stop, there is an end to the life of the individual; and though the human frame contains a power of resistance to its own dissolution, yet, it must be remembered, that the principle of vitality is not only a supporting, but a destroying principle. It finally consumes the very body which it preserves.

Many are the remedies, which, under diverse names and forms, have been invented for the prolongation of life, and for giving, if I may so speak, a sort of temporal eternity to man. But these preparations, instead of being conducive to the end for which they were designed,

have usually been found calculated only to shorten the period of existence by the destructive ingredients of which they were composed. Those ingredients have tended to stimulate the system into an unnatural excess of action, which has caused a more rapid expenditure; a premature consumption of the powers of life. Any mixture, of whatever nature it may be, which increases the strength, or incites the activity of the vital powers to a degree beyond what is natural, or what the human frame, in a healthy state, requires; or, on the other hand, which reduces the strength and activity of the vital principle, below that which is agrecable to nature and necessary for health, must equally induce debility and accelerate decay: and perpetually to keep the system in that degree of strength, that ca-

pacity of action and of sensibility to stimuli which is most in unison with the fixed laws of nature and of health, seems impossible, unless we could previously secure the corporeal fibre against that tendency to dissolution and decay, which is inherent in all organized matter; and which, after a certain period, though sooner or later in some individuals than in others, inevitably manifests its force in the destruction of man, the sovereign of the world, as well as in that of all the species of the vegetable or animal tribes; of the beasts of the earth and the fowls of the air; of the trees of the forest and the flowers of the field. These have all their stated periods of beauty and deformity, of youth and age, of life and death. They come up and are cut down; they are vigorous and alert, then motionless and cold; they are sensitive, and soon cease to feel;

they are; and how soon does all that can be said of them, amount to this, that *they have been!!!*

To give any thing like perpetuity to the life of man, seems impossible, unless we could infuse into the frame a durable principle of resistance to the consuming force of the never-ceasing internal and external stimuli, and slow but certain agency of time, while we remove from it that principle of destructibility which it brings into the world. But though man can, in particular cases, by wise and prudent management, by a well-tempered diligence and caution, give a salutary direction to, or prevent the noxious effects of, the laws of nature, yet he can, in no instance, totally subvert any one of those laws; or change that close and indissoluble connexion of cause and effect, which

was established by the maker of the world. Now the death of the human species is one of the most certain of those laws. Death is the fixed, the inevitable consequence of life. The moment we begin to be, we have advanced one step towards that period, when we shall be no more. There may indeed be the variation of a few years, as far as respects the lives of individuals, but the death of the species collectively is determined by a decree, which can never be annulled. The event is certain, though the period may admit of some trifling fluctuations; but even to those who live longest, the term is short. Threescore or fourscore years are the boundary, by which Nature has determined the period of human life; though some few persons have reached that period twice told; but of such persons, as far as accurate accounts of their lives

and habits have been detailed, it appears that the extraordinary longevity was to be ascribed more to some original superiority in the constitution of the fibre than to philosophical contrivance or medical art. There are anomalies in the usual length of the life of man, as well as in that of the lives of other animals; for nature seems often to delight in events which excite our wonder, and awaken all the ardour of curiosity and all the industry of research.

Much as men may be willing to deplore the brevity of human life, it seems, on the whole, and while the physical constitution of man remains as it is, happier for us to have it circumscribed within, than stretched beyond, its present narrow bounds. For it is one of the fixed laws of the physical constitution of our nature, that sensations of

pleasure decrease in force and lose their relish in proportion to their use. Those delights, to which we have been long accustomed, soon cease to excite any vivid satisfaction. The appetite is apt to pall by the experience of any continuance in the same kind of enjoyment even without any excess in the degree. And this is more particularly the case with those pleasures which have, on the first acquaintance, the finest zest, the sweetest flavour, the most voluptuous gratification. For the higher is the temperature of any of our gratifications, the more likely is it the soonest to produce disgust.* If any man could live

* Hence the wise constitution of nature in equalizing the pleasure of mankind. If the rich and luxurious have intervals of higher delight, they are more exposed to sensations of disgust, from which those in more humble life are prevented by the lower temperature of their ordinary gratifica-

to twice or thrice the common period of human life, while his physical constitution remained subject to the same laws to which that of man at present is, it is certain that his sensations of all the possible gratifications of life would, from the frequent repetition, through so long a series of years, become languid and dead. And to what purpose should we live, after we had lost all sense of the pleasure of living?

And if for the sake of supposing what is never likely to happen, any precious elixir or preparation could be discovered, by which the body could be preserved in a state of health and strength for three or four centuries, instead of threescore or fourscore years; it is much to

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tions; and they do not often experience the more stimulating gratifications long enough to tire.

be doubted whether this unnatural prolongation of life, would not be productive of more misery than happiness. For the few, who could possess it, would be objects of envy rather than complacency to the many to whom it was denied. And those few could not but be oppressed with melancholy by the destruction of so many successive generations which they must necessarily witness. Among those generations can it be supposed, that they would not have found many objects of tender attachment, of more than ordinary regard, who, not possessing the same power of longevity, had perished in a more early grave? Thus, therefore, their objects of regret would keep multiplying in an increased ratio in proportion to the protraction of their existence; till, at last the delight in new endearments and connections would be absorbed in sor-

row for the past. And if the supposed increased durability of life were not the favoured boon of a few but the common privilege of all, it is evident that the earth would soon teem with an accumulated and superfluous population; and that either the young must be destroyed to leave room for the old; or the old to leave room for the young. The present contracted span of human life therefore, short as it may seem, appears to be as long as we ought to desire, or, as it was suited to our constitution and our circumstances that we should have. A longer term would not have added to the sum of our enjoyments; and a shorter might not, in general, have suited the purposes of a probationary state.

Though it does not seem probable that the period of human life can, by the discovery of any remedy, or the

adoption of any regimen, ever be preserved beyond the ordinary duration of threescore or fourscore years, yet it is certain that it is often terminated much within that period by our indiscretions, and immoralities; or else that it is rendered a series of suffering and disease; when, by a different mode of conduct, we might probably have enjoyed a green and vigorous old age. All excess in the indulgence of our appetites and passions, must necessarily, from its physical operations on our frame, render our lives either shorter than they would have been, or else bring upon us a degree of debility and disease to which we should not otherwise have been exposed. For though there be much pain and sickness in the world, against which no foresight can guard, and which no caution can prevent, yet it is clear that no small part of it is of our own seeking;

and may, without any impropriety, be ascribed solely to ourselves. If, according to the supposition of some, a certain definite quantity of vital power be communicated to each of us, which, with a proper degree of caution and moderation in the use, would be sufficient to preserve us in a moderate degree of health and strength, and if, instead of economising this precious, and, when lost, irrecoverable deposit, we expend as much of it in one day as ought to last us for ten, it is evident that such an improvident prodigality of life must shorten its duration or accelerate its decay. If a spendthrift will not only lavishly dissipate his interest but his capital, it is plain that he is marching with perpetually increasing strides towards the brink of penury and woe. If a certain definite sum of animal gratification, be not appropriated to each

of us, yet it is certain that the power of producing it is subject to rigorous restrictions; that the sensation of the same pleasure becomes, by an almost imperceptible gradation, less on every repetition; and that consequently we ought not, if we wish to preserve the sensibility to pleasure with which we are entrusted, prematurely to exhaust the power and consequently the stock of enjoyment by an inordinate frequency of indulgence. All our gratifications, however innocent or salutary they may be when used in moderation, become criminal and pernicious when carried to excess. And as such is the nature of our constitution, that sensations of the same pleasure lessen in proportion to the undue frequency of the recurrence, so we find by experience that our greatest delights, may, by the intemperate use, be converted into the

most afflicting pains. For as painful sensations approach to the vicinity of pleasurable ones, in proportion to their decrease, so pleasurable sensations, according to the same ratio of decrease, approach to the confines of pain; and it is found that those enjoyments, which, at first, occasioned the most vivid transports of delight, come at last, by the frequency of the repetition, to be a source of pain, which is hardly compensated by a particle of pleasure. This is particularly the case with the drunken, the libidinous, and other intemperate sensualists, who pursue their favourite indulgences till their capacity of exciting pleasure is exhausted, or rather till the capacity of the individuals to perceive it is extinguished; though the habit has rendered them slaves to what is found productive of nothing but inquietude and suffering, languor and disease.

All our bad passions, (and all our passions are bad, however natural they may be, which are not kept in subjection to a prudent restraint and a reasonable self-government) have a direct tendency to shorten the period of our lives. They accelerate the wear and tear of the fibre; they debilitate and break down the constitution. Envy and revenge, avarice, ambition, and other unlicensed passions, disturb the virtuous serenity of the breast; and render it the seat of acrimony, discontent, and every malevolent sensation, of which the influence is not more adverse to moral satisfaction than it is to physical longevity. Hence, meekness, gentleness, temperance, humility, patience, and other attributes of a beneficent disposition, though they are not necessarily connected with length of life, since they are not necessarily exempted from

organic defects, contagious distempers, and the diversified evils and contingencies of mortality, yet have a tendency to prolong it, by the calm composure, which they produce; the rapid and preternatural waste of the spirits which they prevent; and the equable flow of those which they occasion. Hence we see that the virtues, which the christian doctrine most inculcates, are not likely to be without even a temporal recompense; and that, at any rate, we may number them among the best means, the safest and least costly preservatives of a long and happy life. Truly then did our Saviour promise rest,—a freedom from all temporal solicitudes and cares, to those, who sincerely cherish his doctrine; who make it the measure of their interest and the rule of their lives. For it generates more than any thing else was ever found to

do, a contented and peaceable disposition; and the powers of life never act with so much harmony or so little attrition, as when that disposition most prevails. The intimate connection which there is between physical health and moral satisfaction is never attended to by physicians so much as it deserves, but it was well seen by Christ, the physician of souls; in the precepts of whose doctrine is contained a remedy not only for our moral, but for no small portion of our corporeal ills. When men for the sake of pleasure or advancement, plunge into the vortex of worldly care, where all the base and sordid passions agitate the soul, they ultimately find that, instead of obtaining their end, they have brought upon themselves nothing but vexation and disappointment. But, did we ever know that any, who ever sought to procure happi-

ness in doing the will of God, as Christ has enjoined it to be done, and with the hope of that eternal recompense with which he ratified the performance, could justly complain that their exertions were productive of nothing but self dissatisfaction and disgust? Have they not been rather willing to proclaim that they persisted in a course, in which alone true joy was to be found?

Though there are few, who are not convinced that life is short, yet how few show the fruits of this conviction in their lives!—How few live, as if they imagined that life were soon to have an end!—The shortness of life seems neither to damp the ardour of vain and empty speculations, to moderate the eagerness of unprofitable pursuits, to contract the schemes, or to assuage the

desires of avarice or ambition. It would not indeed be right that our consciousness of the brevity of life should be so strong, as to afford any encouragement to inactivity and indolence; or any obstruction to honest and vigorous exertion. For this would be to counteract the physical and moral use of the conviction. And we should consider that, if life be short, one of the most important inferences to be drawn from it, is to make a good use of it while it lasts; to leave as small a portion of it, as possible, without some useful and profitable employment. For God would not have given us faculties so improveable, if he had not intended that we should assiduously labour in their improvement. And as life is so short, it should quicken our diligence and augment our endeavours. For, notwithstanding its brevity, our fitness for the

fruition of eternity, depends on the virtuous use of our faculties and our time, according to the circumstances in which we are placed, and the opportunities which we possess.

He, who is in the possession of life, does not live on the interest of the capital, but on the capital itself, which he is continually consuming. Every day makes it less than it was before. The sun never shines but on men who are doomed to die; and every morning, in which he rises, he beholds us so much nearer to our end than we were the preceding evening. Time itself is only a succession of instants; and though the larger portions of it seem tardily to pass away; yet the small infinitesimal parts of which they are composed, fly with a rapidity swifter than thought; and it surpasses all the power of man to lessen their velocity.

Now life itself, though increased to the length of one hundred years, is only an accumulation of moments, of particles of time too short to be counted, as well as too rapid to be stayed. It is clear, therefore, that we are, with a silent and imperceptible, though an almost incalculable celerity, approaching to the sepulchre of death. Ought we not then, with our utmost vigilance and care, to economise every moment of life; and not to lavish any part of it in barren negligence or criminal dissipation?

The shortness of life may well teach us not to set so high a value on those things, which we must soon quit. For, certainly with respect to the pleasures and possessions of this life, one of the criterions of value ought to be the period of enjoyment. Now if we apply this standard of value to those things

which are most the object of human desire, how much will they be depreciated? How low will they sink in an estimate so rational, and to which no solid objections can be opposed! For, how can we fix a more reasonable test of the value of those things, which we most anxiously covet and most ardently pursue, than by trying them by the degree of permanence and solidity in the happiness which they produce? But how short and unsubstantial are all the pleasures which any thing temporal, which wealth or power can supply! Indeed, is it not often found that the advantages, which they may procure, are more than balanced by the associated vexations? And even leaving those vexations, which however imperiously claim a place in the account, out of the question, how contracted is the duration of human bliss! Much of our time passes away in the forgetfulness of sleep. Much of

it in a sort of negative state, in which, if we do not sleep, we have hardly any vivid consciousness of existence; in which our sentient and percipient powers seem to stagnate in a sort of torpid inactivity; without being agitated by any impressions of pleasure or of pain! And no small portion of human life, short as it is, is often occupied by actual suffering, the diversified species of corporeal woe, which make it almost a burthen to live. And, after deducting the large portions of life, which are consumed in sleep, in apathy, or in suffering—how little will be left for positive gratification! And if even those pleasures, which are innocent, have so short a date, are liable to so many interruptions and to a mixture of vexation and disgust, how worthless must those be, which are vicious, and cannot be enjoyed without violating the prohibitions of reason and conscience, which

are in reality so unsatisfactory while they last, and are a source only of painful reflection, when they are over? The shortness of life should teach us not to covet much, but to be contented with little. Our desires are usually greater than our power of enjoyment, considered both in relation to our physical capacity and to the time allowed for the enjoyment. We covet more than we want; more than we have time to use, or could enjoy if we had time. How vain is it to endeavour to accumulate materials of enjoyment which we can never enjoy, which at last cause nothing but satiety and disgust, while we lose all present tranquillity and happiness in the pursuit?

The shortness of life should teach us to harbour no hatred nor malice in our hearts. For every sensation of malevolence is a sensation of inquietude

and woe, while it is indulged; and, though it seems to tend to the injury of others, it will always ultimately be found to have a stronger tendency to inflict misery on ourselves. But, when the period of enjoyment is so short, and the sufferings of life, which no foresight can avert, are so numerous, why should we voluntarily diminish the one and increase the other? Why should we render our pleasures less and our sufferings greater than they otherwise would be? For, all malevolence, beyond the physical sensation of resentment on the *first* perception of pain or injury, is gratuitous: we may avoid it, if we will. But nothing so soon gathers strength by indulgence; and we cannot cherish an enemy more fatal to our peace; or which, by its corrosive qualities, tends more immediately to shorten our lives and to accelerate our decay.

The shortness of life should teach us to omit no opportunity of doing good. For, as far as we can collect, from various analogies in the moral world and from the whole tenour and spirit of the Christian revelation, there is no truth, which is more certain or more important than this, that "our recompense in a future life will be proportioned to our goodness in this." Now we know that goodness is a collective term, which includes many particular actions, or much good done in single instances. Every opportunity of doing good therefore, which we suffer to escape us, is so much taken from the sum of good, which we might have done; and, consequently, from the recompense, which we should otherwise have received.—What we reap in the harvest, depends on what we sow in the seed time; but, if the seed time be short and precarious, this consideration, instead of re-

laxing, ought rather to quicken our activity and diligence. For, when we have much to do, our negligence and our indolence must be ruinous to our interest in proportion to the shortness of the time, in which it is to be done. Short as life is, an eternity of bliss is dependant on the use which we make of it; on the good, to which we render it subservient.

There is a maxim which is often heard from the mouths of the thoughtless and the profligate, "a short life and a merry one." But, if by a merry life, be meant a life of pernicious and extravagant sensuality, no assertion can be more false; for it is certain that such a life must necessarily contain in it a much greater portion of pain than pleasure. For it is the natural effect of all immoderate indulgences not only to render life shorter than it otherwise would be,

but to render it more unhappy than it otherwise would be; and thus, not only to diminish the sum of its enjoyments with respect to their duration, but even with respect to their actual quantity, while they last. Thus, for instance, habitual intemperance has an immediate tendency to shorten life; but it certainly has no tendency to accumulate a larger portion of pleasure within any short period of time, than sobriety could procure. If we could estimate the sum of pleasure which the habitually drunken and the habitually sober enjoy in any short space, as within the circumference of a day, a week, a month, or a year, there is good reason to believe that we should find the balance greatly in favour of the sober. For, all excess of indulgence, not to mention the moral dissatisfaction and disgust, always tends to produce a degree of languor, debility, and uneasiness, greater than can be compen-

sated by the pleasure. And all animal gratifications must necessarily, from the constitution of man, which is incapable of enduring for any length of time the action of any pleasurable stimulus, that is greater than natural, be fugitive and evanescent. The nerves are soon stimulated to their highest pitch of pleasure; but they cannot, in respect to any animal gratifications, be kept long stationary there; and the transition is rapid and often instantaneous from the highest pitch of pleasure to the lowest degree of pain. Thus we see that all vicious pleasures, which are usually found to be pleasures not in kind but in degree, are calculated not only to shorten our days but to increase our misery; and that consequently there can be no truth whatever in the popular saying of "a short life and a merry one;" for the same temperate and virtuous course of life, is best fitted both to pro-

long its duration and to increase the sum of its enjoyments.

There are few persons, whatever may be their station or their circumstances, their degree of affluence or their means of enjoyment, who have not, at some period or other of their lives, had sad experience of this melancholy sentiment, that "all which is, is vanity;" that, in those things, which we most covet and which seem most fitted to delight, there is no solid, no lasting satisfaction; that, on the contrary, they are often found productive of sorrow and vexation, regret and disappointment. This sentiment, so well calculated to check our presumption and mortify our pride, and from the occasional intrusion of which no man living is exempted, seems to have been designed not to depress our spirits, but to check the extravagance of our desires; and to teach us

not to set our hearts on any terrestrial objects, which are rather the shadows than the realities of bliss. While all other things are found illusory and vain, frustrating the expectation, and saddening the heart, there is but one thing, which is found to produce pleasure unfading and unalloyed; and that is a virtuous course of life; in which the individual has to the utmost of his ability, with all his might and all his soul "eschewed evil and done good." And this we are most powerfully incited to do by the awful consideration that the work is most momentous, and that life is short.

DEATH,

Morally and Practically considered.

PART II.

HAD the length of life, instead of being so fluctuating and precarious, varying from the span of less than a day long to a period of a century or more, been fixed at a certain definite number of years, which it was never to exceed, and less than which it was never to be, there would have been no occasion, as there now is, to remind men of the uncertainty of life. It would have been sufficient often to recal to their recollection the certainty of death.—But when life is so uncertain that the precise duration of it

can never be ascertained, its uncertainty becomes a most important consideration, as it furnishes the strongest arguments for, and the most interesting persuasions to, a continual preparation for an event, that can never be very distant; and which may happen at any hour in the day.—Had life been confined to any determinate length, from which no variation was allowed, it would not have afforded those impressive reasons for perpetual vigilance, for immediate repentance when we have done what is evil, and for unintermitted zeal in doing good, which we now draw, and can hardly help drawing, from the precarious condition on which we hold the tenure of existence.—The more uncertain life is, the greater must be the danger of delaying our moral reformation. Had life always been of the same invariable duration, it would have been a matter of much

greater difficulty than it now is, to induce men to think of another life, till they were certain that the period was arrived when they must quit this. Uncertainty therefore seems one of the necessary adjuncts of a probationary life; or, of a state of trial, which is preparatory to a state of recompense.

Life may be regarded as a sea, full of concealed shoals and rocks and quicksands, which often elude the most vigilant precautions; and on which we are liable every moment to be dashed to pieces and sunk in the abyss of waters. Or it may be likened to a road, in which death is continually lying in ambush to destroy the passenger who travels it.—And no vigilance, no exertion, no going backward or forward, no turning to the right or to the left, can prevent the blow.

The uncertainty of life may be considered as the compound of various contingencies, which almost mock calculation in their number, as much as they do foresight in the event.—Many are the causes of sudden death, which may be computed; and there are more, which are unknown.—Many are the perils and accidents both by sea and land; many the dangers of contagious and epidemical distempers; and our days may, at almost any moment, be brought to an end by the fracture and dislocation of limbs, or by sickness and disease in a thousand forms.—Neither health nor strength are privileged against the attack, nor afford any protection against the inroads of death. For the healthy and the strong are often suddenly and unexpectedly vanishing into the world unknown.—And when we rise in the morning, there is not only a possibility,

but, as the annals of humanity prove, a faint degree of probability, that we may die before night; for in that havoc, which death is every day making in the world, some of the young, the high-spirited, and robust, are continually numbered among the victims of his unsparing cruelty.

A sudden death is never an impossible event, though the probabilities in favour of its happening to any particular individual are, by the wise administrator of the world, made just so many as to produce useful caution, without exciting pernicious or unnecessary fear.—Had the event been more frequent than it is, or had the instances of an unforeseen, unthought-of, and instantaneous dissolution been more numerous than they are, the spirits might have been so depressed, by the overwhelming apprehension, as

to unfit the person for the practical duties of life;—for a proper and due degree of attention to his temporal interest and the interest of his fellow-creatures.—But yet the fatal casualty is seen often enough to repress, at least in the sober and considerate part of mankind, all careless levity of thought, all improvident waste of time;—a gift so precious and so precarious;—and to teach them that it can never be safe in any moment of life to be unprepared for death.

And whatever may be the diversified casualties to which life is exposed, it is clear that they are not more than sufficient to impress sober caution; for, in the majority of cases, so thoughtless and improvident is man, they are found even not to have that degree of influence, but to be totally disregarded or despised.—

Engaged in a continual round of business, dissipation, or amusement, immersed in the luxury of wealth or vexed with the misery of want, men give little heed to the awful instances of mortality, which are open to their observation; and, though there is nothing so momentous as death, there is perhaps nothing, which, in the majority of cases, so little engages the attention of mankind.

Philosophers have remarked, and those who know themselves are conscious of having felt, a propensity in matters of uncertain expectation, to magnify the chances in their favour, and to lessen those against them. Hardly an individual purchases a share in a lottery, who does not secretly imagine that he shall have one of the capital prizes; though, perhaps, the chances are hardly less than five thousand to one against him. But,

in respect to the probable misfortunes and sudden fatalities of life, though the chances be not half so many against their happening to any particular individual, almost every man is so confident that they will not fall to his share, that they give him no concern. They neither alarm his fears, nor disturb his rest.—If a man were living in a village in which there were only four or five hundred inhabitants, and three or four of them, on an average, were, in the course of the year, to come to a sudden end, it is probable that this would not, in the rest, either lessen the confidence of life or increase the fear of death.—Thus we see how much more common and invincible is hope than fear, and a sanguine confidence than a timid apprehension.

If we could estimate how many annually perish by consumption, fever,

atrophy, dropsy, stone, gout, colic, epilepsy, by contagious and other diseases, and of these how many were in the prime of life, and perhaps once anticipated the prospect of many coming years, we should find that death, or, at least, the proximate cause of death, was never far removed from any particular individual; and that the duration of life was as inconstant and fluctuating as the winds or the waves. And yet, though we are placed in such a situation of danger and uncertainty, we find that, in the majority of cases, it has little effect in rendering men humble in their views, or moderate in their desires; in checking the career of avarice or ambition. — But a wise and sober man, though he will not so far attend to the casualties of human affairs or the chances of death, as to make him neglect the practical business of life, will yet

consider that it behoves him never to be unprepared for what is always so probable and ultimately so certain an event. —For the danger of not being prepared is so great, and so great is the chance that death will find us unprepared, if we be not continually mindful of the uncertainty of life, that a wise and a good man will often reflect on his latter end; and will always endeavour so to live that he may never be unfit to die.

In this probationary state, the great business of life is to prepare for death; and to be prepared for death, is to be qualified for the inheritance of eternal blessedness. For death is only a gloomy point of separation between us and an endless life. The way to immortality is through the gates of the grave.—This consideration renders death rather an object of joy than dread; and, on the

whole, and considering the many miseries of life, less to be deprecated than desired.—But, at the same time, from the everlasting interest which is connected with the event, it cannot but be an object of continual solicitude and unceasing care.

It may be said that, if all men were thus to think and to consider a fit preparation for death, the most necessary business of life, life itself would soon resemble the barren desolation and gloomy stillness of the grave; that all the works of industry would cease; that commerce would be annihilated; and that the land would be untilled owing to the devotion of the occupier.—But, this is so far from being the case, that it would render men more vigilant and active in every useful exertion, every virtuous pursuit.—For, religion rightly understood, is a practical

thing: it does not recommend sloth; but inspire zeal and diligence in performing every good work.—It encourages every exertion whether physical or moral; whether relating to the arts, to agriculture, or to commerce, which is compatible with innocence, and connected with the happiness of man; with any addition to his means of subsistence, to his conveniences or pleasures.—If this be the tendency of religion, then certainly the best preparation for death must be a life of vigorous and beneficent activity, not less conducive to our own good than the good of others. And to this we have certainly very urgent incentives in the uncertainty of life.—For, as the time for exertion is, at the best, so precarious, to let any opportunity escape us, or not to make the best use of the time which we have, not vigorously to exercise the faculties which we enjoy,

and to improve the talents, with which we are intrusted, and for the improvement of which we shall be accountable after death, is to be strangely negligent of our best and dearest interest.—It is to trifle with the only good, which has any reality or permanence.

When we consider that in the world, in which we are living, and which is introductory to another, our continuance cannot be long and must always be uncertain, (for man is wisely precluded from all knowledge of futurity,) it surely behoves us to be sober and vigilant; and not abandon ourselves to a dissipated and vicious course of life; thoughtless of what we are, of the end for which we are placed here, and of that hereafter, which is continually impending over us. —For, if death do surprise us, while we are morally unfit to die, or while the ha-

bit of goodness has taken no root in our hearts and minds, our destruction may be irreparable, and our misery past cure.

But, though we may escape the several accidents and diseases, which so often shorten the days of man, and by which so many of our fellow-creatures are annually and prematurely cut off, it is certain that death must come at last. We may live long; but the longest life must have an end.—In a few years not one of the present generation will remain. Others will arise to fill the space which we now possess; and will tread on our graves, as we now tread on the graves of those, who have gone before us.—And hardly a century will elapse before it is probable that of the great majority of us, the very name will be forgotten; and every trace, which can call to mind that we ever were, will be effaced.

All this will assuredly come to pass; nor is it more certain that we are now living than that we shall hereafter be dead. It is not more true that we are now sentient beings, than that within the compass of no long period, we shall be insensate carcases;—the flesh rotted from off our bones, and the very structure of our frame dissolved.—We, who are now all motion, perception and sensation, alive to every pleasurable and every painful feeling, shall soon be stiff and cold as the clod of the field. These are popular and common-place ideas; but they are not less useful; for how many are the errors, into which men rush for want of their being constantly remembered.—For what is more wanting to check the vanity of some and to repress the ambition of others, to moderate the lust of dominion and the rapacity of avarice?

Though all men know that they must die, yet few live as if they had any knowledge at all about the matter.—They are as indifferent about death, as if it were the most remote contingency;—a fact which had never occupied their thoughts. —Thus it becomes necessary to tell men that they must die, to remind mortal man of his mortality, to teach beings so frail and perishable that they are nothing but dust and corruption.

To anticipate evil, it may be said, and said truly, is to mar the enjoyment of the present, and to repress active exertion by imaginary apprehensions. It is besides to distrust the good providence of God, under which we shall be as safe to-morrow as we are to-day; but to entertain a sober apprehension of death, is not to anticipate a fancied evil, but to prepare ourselves to enjoy a last-

ing good. For the good and wise often and seriously reflect on death, not because they dread the event, or distrust the providence of God, who, they know, arranges all things for the best, but because they are convinced that the contemplation of the uncertain and inevitable catastrophe is necessary to prevent worldly things from getting too strong a hold on their affections; to suppress the growth of lust, of avarice, of pride and envy, in their hearts; and to make them cherish, with the most tender concern, a pure, beneficent, and humble, spirit.

Can I think that I am about to die, and not feel that it is of the utmost importance to consider how I live? If death be continually approaching towards me, if every day may be my last, but one day, and that at no great dis-

tance, certainly will, it surely behoves me to consider what is the course of conduct which I shall esteem to have been most wise and prudent, when I come to die. When I am stretched out on that bed, from which I shall rise no more, what are the habits, what are the actions, on the culture and the performance of which, I shall reflect with the most pleasurable satisfaction; when all the false glitter of life is vanished; when things appear in their true colours; and the mind, no longer cheated by appearances, imposed on by prejudices, or a slave to popular opinion, is able to form a true estimate of good and evil; to distinguish between the specious and the sound; between real and imaginary happiness? Then will it be not only clearly understood, but palpably felt, that virtue and interest, or the uniform performance of our duty and the

possession of the greatest possible good, however dissimilar or separate we might fancy them to be in the moment of sensual excess, when we were heated with revenge, inflamed with lust, or incited by ambition, were always intimately conjoined, and, in fact, only constituted the same thing under different appellations?

A vicious course of life is always accompanied with present dissatisfaction. Till the conscience is hardened past the feeling of remorse by long-continued habits of iniquity, no vicious, no libidinous, unjust, or cruel, action, is ever done without some uneasiness at present, and some fearful apprehension of punishment hereafter. For it is remarkable, that, as long as man retains any sense of the differences of moral good and evil, the latter never fails

to present itself to his mind as a fit object of punishment; and this impression no degree of self-love is ever able to efface. For, however much men may love themselves, or whatever may be the sophistry with which they may extenuate their guilt, or palliate their crimes, they never can regard any act of falsehood, of injustice, or inhumanity, which they may commit, with sensations of complacency, or consider it as an object of reward. The ideas of sin and shame, and punishment, are too strongly associated in the human mind, even for the most profligate entirely to dissolve. The immediate gains or gratifications, which are consequent on any unrighteous deed, may diminish the sensation of regret, and, for a season, render the person insensible to the dread of punishment; but a time will come, when that regret and that dread can no

longer be mitigated or suppressed. At the hour of death, when the relish for sensual delights is at an end, sin, which is now concealed by the blandishments of sense, will appear in all its naked horror and deformity, an object only of aversion and disgust. For, if when we are in health and strength, and are in no fear of death, we cannot reflect with that cordial satisfaction, which is the effect of an approving conscience, on any species of immorality, we may be convinced, even without being present at the death-beds of unrighteous men, that every particular of a vicious life must be most bitter and distressing to the thoughts at that moment, when the spirits are depressed, and the body is a prey to debility and disease. And however strong or healthy we may be, we know that health and strength are possessions on whose continuance no re-

liance can be placed; that they are unstable as water, and variable as the wind; that to those whose sinews are best strung and whose frame is most robust, the period of decay is continually approaching, and that the hour of dissolution must at last arrive. The sentence of dust to dust was passed upon them before they were born, and nothing can avert the execution.

Happy would it be for men, if they would often think on these things. For is it not dreadful to be roused out of our sleep by the noise of thieves or the cry of fire? But these are only momentary fears or temporary inconveniences, which admit of many alleviations; which courage may dispel, which prudence may defeat, or friendship may sooth. But how much more dreadful is it to be surprised by death, to be

called on unexpectedly, and when our souls are far from being in a state of moral preparation to obey the awful summons, to appear at the bar of eternity, to surrender up an account of all that we have said, or thought, or done, and to hear the Judge of all the earth pronounce our everlasting destiny! Here no courage, no prudence, no friendship, can be of any avail to combat the fear or mitigate the suffering. Let us then be wise in time; let us never forget at night, that so uncertain is life, we may die before the morning; and in the morning before night. And let us remember that when we are most fit to die, we are then in the best disposition to relish all the innocent enjoyments of life.

DEATH,

Philosophically, Morally, and Practically, considered.

PART III.

MANKIND have only one way of entering into life, but they have many of going out of it. Night and day the gates of the grave are open; and a hundred different causes may hurry us through the gloomy portal into the regions of oblivion. Some die suddenly and unexpectedly. Death perhaps surprises them in the jovial hour; or, at least, attacks them when they are far from being conscious of their approaching end. Dazzled by the illusions of hope, many think that they shall live,

while their attendants know, by certain indications, that they must die ; or having their thoughts absorbed in things of less moment, they see not the impending blow, which is ready to terminate their existence.

But there are many, who, either from the state of their health, or from the decline of their years, have a reasonable conviction, a feeling persuasion, that they have not much longer to live. They know that, in a few days, that body, which now sees and hears and feels, will become as insensate as a stone; that the vital heat will be vanished, and the moral consciousness gone, we know not whither, but into a state very different from the present.

As it is right for a person, before he sets out on any long journey from home,

so to regulate his affairs, and to adjust the economy of his house and family, that his absence may occasion as little inconvenience as possible to those who are left behind, so much more incumbent is it on them, who are about to set out on a longer journey, from which they are never to return, to take the utmost possible care to settle their temporal concerns in that way which seems most likely to benefit their surviving relatives, and to leave no occasion of discontent and animosity behind them.

As those who die can take nothing with them into another world, but must leave their houses, their lands, and all that they possess, it behoves them to make such a distribution of their property as may be most consistent with the obligations of justice and of charity. And, in this distribution, they should

be governed as little as possible by any considerations of former animosities or affronts; for nothing is so dangerous to a man's future welfare as the exertion of a vindictive spirit at his dying hour. Have any of his children incurred his displeasure, let him not shew any marks of it in the last acts of his life, in which he has an opportunity of shewing it. The whole life of a Christian ought to be regulated by love; and surely his death bed ought not to be defiled by any exhibition of malevolence. But, what can be more disgraceful to the character of a parent, who professes the Christian doctrine, than to make a partial and unequal distribution of his property among his children, merely from the impulses of personal resentment? A man may, indeed, bequeath his property in that way, and in those portions, in which he conscientiously

judges, from the disposition of those who are to inherit it, that it is most likely to be beneficial; but he ought to beware, lest under the pretext of conscience and the calculations of humanity, he do not morally indulge the feeling of selfishness and animosity. If there be any period in which we ought, with more than usual earnestness and sincerity, to repeat that most important petition, "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us," it is when we ourselves are about to appear at the bar of eternity, and most urgently to need the forgiveness of God for our many errors and transgressions.

Most incumbent is it on the dying man to call to mind, as far as memory will permit, all the actions of his past life, and particularly those which relate

to his dealings with others. Has he acquired any property by cunning or oppression, secret stratagem or open violence? Let him well consider that no such property is ever likely to descend with a blessing to his posterity; that it is, in a great measure, like leaving a garment infected with the plague; and that poverty, with all its concomitant ills, is preferable to riches obtained by means which Christianity forbids. Where any wealth, therefore, has been obtained by cruelty and injustice, it is better for the person to restore it to the original possessors; or where that is impossible, from the particular circumstances of the case, to devote it to charitable uses, than to leave an ill-gotten inheritance to his children. For a house is not more likely to fall that is built upon the sand, than prosperity is to decay that is founded on injustice.

To make restitution for any wrong which we have done, is a most difficult and yet a most necessary work; and, if it have been delayed till the period of his decease, let the dying man well consider the danger to which he is exposed, if he go out of the world before it is accomplished. For, to retain with our dying hand the fruits of our injustice, is to die impenitent, and nothing but misery awaits the impenitent after death. Those who have much to leave, ought to leave it so that it may not remain a memorial of their pride, but of their beneficence. Let them not seek the ideal and posthumous gratification of perpetuating their property in an individual; and of enriching one by impoverishing many. Ought a dying man, who must, we should think, so feelingly be convinced of the perishable nature of all human things, to exult in the hope of

having his lands called after his own name? Are not such expectations as fallacious as they are vain? Is any thing stable upon earth? Is not property as mutable and fluctuating as the life or health of the possessor? Can we foresee the calamities or extravagance of our heirs? Ought we not then, instead of making what we possess subservient only to the pomp of life, rather so to dispose of what we possess, as to produce the greatest degree of comfort and rational enjoyment? And surely it is always better to give a competency to several, than to bestow an enormous mass of wealth on one. It is better to put a whole family within the reach of obtaining the decent conveniences and innocent pleasures of life, than to enable any favoured relative to lead a luxurious life or shine with all the parade of opulence.

When a man is conscious that he has not much longer to live, he is most likely to form a just estimate of the value of those things which are most prized in the world. He is convinced, by sad experience, of their vain and perishable nature; that the lustre, in which they were arrayed by the influence of popular opinion and false associations, was delusive; and that nothing but goodness is capable of affording lasting satisfaction. Now, though this conviction, the fruit of dear-bought experience, can no longer be useful to the individual in that world which he is so soon to leave, yet he may render it subservient to the good of his fellow-creatures, to the correction of the vicious, or the confirmation of the just. Let him, therefore, as far as his strength will permit, not fail to declare to those around him the result of his reflections. Let him deliver those

admonitions, which he knows and feels it to be of the utmost importance for them to follow; and, by which, if his life should come over again, he would judge it most conducive to his own happiness to regulate his conduct. The sight of a dying man has something in it peculiarly striking; and as sympathy is continually impelling us to transfer the feelings and circumstances of others to ourselves, it tends, in the most forcible manner, to bring the image of death in contact with our sensations. Nor can the serious and pathetic exhortations of one, who is on the point of vanishing into eternity, well fail of making a deep impression on the heart. We know, that at such a time, it is hardly possible for any individual, who possesses common seriousness, and is at all sensible of his awful situation, to practise any dissimulation or disguise. At other mo-

ments, a man may counsel what he does not think, or speak what he does not feel; a false delicacy and reserve may cause him to conceal the conviction that is settled in his heart; but, at the last hour, there is no longer any occasion for reserve, or any fear of disclosing the real thoughts and longings of the soul. What a man says, therefore, while he is impressed with a consciousness of his approaching end, as long as his corporeal pains or physical infirmities do not cloud or prevent the operations of his reason, may, in a great majority of cases, be regarded as genuine and sincere, without any the least mixture of falsehood or hypocrisy. When a dying man then calls his relations and domestics about him, to bid them a last adieu, affectionately to reprove some and to encourage others, to check the vicious propensities of some, or to sti-

mulate the virtuous exertions of others, and when there can be no suspicion that what is said is either interested or insincere, either prompted by envy or malevolence, the most wholesome moral impressions are likely to be made. The awful scene, with which the advice was associated, will tend to prevent it from being erased from the recollection, or recollected with levity and indifference. Thus a man may be able to render even the last moments of his life subservient to the purposes of piety and beneficence. Thus, even bad men may make some small reparation for their enormities, by ingenuously declaring the result of their experience, that a virtuous course of life is the only solid ground or permanent source of genuine satisfaction; and by warning others against the same dangers which have proved fatal to themselves. And surely the last mo-

ments of the righteous can hardly fail of furnishing the beholder both with comfort and instruction ; for righteousness is found to afford pleasure at that period when every thing else has lost all power to please ; and the last solemn exhortations of righteous men are too weighty to be despised, and too precious to be forgotten.

Some considerations respecting the nature of that state into which we are to pass after death, may well deserve our consideration, both at that hour, when our days are almost brought to an end, when faith is about to give way to sight, and hope to enjoyment, and at other periods also, when our health is vigorous and our spirits fresh. First, we may reflect that the state into which the spirits of the just are to migrate after the dissolution of the body, in

whatever its enjoyments may consist, will be very different from the present. It will be a state in which there is no gross or sensual gratification; and therefore very unlike that which we now possess. For all our present pleasures, even those which are most refined, have something of a sensual relish. Something earthly, impure, and corporeal, is necessarily mingled in their essence, or associated with the perception of the enjoyment. Even our intellectual pleasures, in which we seem to ascend to a more exalted scale of being, partake of the more gross associations, which flesh and blood must invariably produce.

In the Scripture, the pleasures of Heaven are not attempted to be described; for if they had been, we, in our present state, could no more have

understood the description, than a man blind from his birth could be made to understand the precise nature of colours from any words which we could use. We might tell such a person what colours were not, though we could not so readily excite a perception of what they were. We might say, that they were not like the sensation of hard or soft, or sweet or sour, or the odour of flowers, or the sounds of musical strings; and thus he might know that they were perceptions different from any which he then possessed; but a capacity for which he could not obtain without a change in his physical constitution. Of the just, in the everlasting mansions, we are rather told in what the blessedness does not, than in what it does consist.

It is said, that in Heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage; nei-

ther hunger nor thirst; neither eat nor drink; nor experience any of those corporeal delights which are commonly esteemed the principal constituents of earthly happiness; but that they are as the angels, incorporeal spirits, without the gross incumbrance of a material form. Our moral and intellectual pleasures, which arise from the exercise of the best and purest affections of the heart, and the noblest faculties of the mind, must approach the nearest in kind and in degree to those which Heaven will present; but even these, the best and purest pleasures of mortal man, must be a very inadequate representation of that blessedness which those enjoy, who are liberated from every earthly impurity and every perverse association.

As this life is always represented in

the Christian Scriptures as preparatory to another, so another life ought, in a greater measure, to be considered as a continuance of this. For the relation, which a future life bears to this, is much the same as that which seed-time bears to harvest; and though the harvest cannot literally be said to be a continuance of the seed-time, yet there certainly is a relation between them of the closest continuity; for the fruits of harvest always bear a certain proportion to the quality and the quantity of the seed that was sown. If, therefore, a future life be, in the same manner, a continuance of the present, it is probable, that we shall carry with us into the regions beyond the grave not only the stock of moral qualities which we have improved, but that of the intellectual ideas which we have acquired. For we cannot suppose that death will sepa-

rate that connection which now subsists between true wisdom and real virtue. between piety and knowledge, between an intimate acquaintance with the works of God and obedience to his will. And as even here that service of the Deity is most acceptable which is most rational, in which the mind co-operates with the affections, and approves and consecrates the oblations of the heart, so we may conclude that the connection between piety and knowledge will continue even in Heaven; and that a man will carry with him the improvements of his mind as well as of his heart.* The great end for which we were sent into the world is to cultivate the mind and heart; and, no doubt,

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* Knowledge without virtue will only increase our condemnation; for in proportion to the knowledge of our duty, must be the sin of not observing it.

because, as the sowing of the earth is preparatory to harvest, such culture is introductory to an eternity of happiness. We cannot therefore suppose that the real knowledge which we acquire, any more than the undissembled virtues which we practise, will perish with us in the tomb; or that the energies of the most sublime and highly cultivated intellect will for ever be extinguished by the blast of death. It seems far more probable to suppose, that our stock of knowledge as well as of goodness will survive the dissolution of our mortal frame, and remain incorporated with our consciousness in a happier country; but increased in quantity and in power, by the beneficence of Him who will reward us in proportion to the degree in which we have improved those faculties which were capable of improvement; and who, to them who

have converted their talent into ten talents, will give ten talents more.

Hence, in a future state of things, we have good ground for believing not only that the powers of the mind will be improved, but the sphere allotted for their exercise. More of the works of God will be presented to our view; and many as are the proofs which we now have of his wisdom and his goodness, we shall then have evidence still more clear and more striking; a display of the divine perfections still more majestic and sublime, suited to our then more enlarged views, and more exalted and more capacious apprehensions. We shall see more to praise and to admire; and our veneration and our love of The Only-Good and The Only-Wise, will be more perfect and more pure. No perplexing doubts, no unfa-

vourable surmises, which now arise from the circumstances of probation in which we are placed, will interpose to cloud our reason or chill our gratitude. And it is probable that we shall not only see and know more of the divine operations, not only become acquainted with more links in that infinite chain of causes, which ascend from the least mite upon the globe to the throne of God, and thus be enabled to take a wider survey of the physical wonders of creation, but shall also have a larger and clearer insight into the moral government of the universe, discerning how the Father of all living is gradually preparing the countless myriads of intelligent beings, by a course of discipline adapted to the disposition and circumstances of every individual, for a state of glory and happiness; and thus making one state of being a scale of pro-

gression to a higher; and hence we shall be able to reconcile all the irregularities, all the seemingly partial and disproportionate communications of happiness or misery, all the appearances of cruelty or neglect, which we observe in our present condition, with the most perfect wisdom and beneficence. For all the doubts which may now occasionally rise in our minds respecting that wisdom, must be traced to our imperfect conceptions of the moral government of God; but which will for ever disappear when we are permitted to take a more comprehensive survey of its operations, and see how that scheme, which the supreme intelligence devised for the happiness of man, was gradually developed and matured by his providential administration, carried on through a succession of ages; and how, notwithstanding so many untoward ap-

pearances, and so dreadful a clash of human interests and passions, the great plan was all the while advancing to a happy termination.

It is always pleasant to reflect on dangers that are past; on cares and sorrows, which we have experienced, but from which we are happily released; and to which we are no longer to be exposed. And, in a future life, it will certainly constitute a source of singular complacency to reflect on the perils and the sufferings which we had to encounter in this probationary life.

Then too it is probable, that we shall meet again those, from whom we are now parted by the grave. Then we shall renew our acquaintance on happier terms; placed beyond the reach of uncertainty and every misfortune. Here

we find that there is hardly any thing more agreeable than to renew our intimacy with those, who have been long separated from us; who, after having participated in the pleasures of our youth, or been endeared to us by the force of early associations, have gone into other climes, or been placed in circumstances which precluded all intercourse between us and them. But, more agreeable must be the meeting after death, when no other separation is to follow; and when the reciprocal love, which was begun in time, is to continue through eternity.* Here the tenderest friendships, the best and the dearest affinities of affection and of interest, are often embittered by the re-

* Every possession in this life, every thing which the most fortunate can obtain, or the happiest can enjoy, is diminished in value, by the probability of losing it.

flection that they are always liable to interruption, and must one day have an end. They seldom fail of being accompanied by those chilling intervals, when esteem relaxes or affection cloys, when disgust or suspicion intervenes to repress the effusions of kindness, or to prevent the unreserved communications of the soul. And, at any rate, there is a period prescribed for their decay and their destruction, beyond which, no art can lengthen their duration. But, in heaven, the immutable permanence of every enjoyment must prevent every painful apprehension of loss, every sad foreboding of decay; and as every delight will there be removed from every possibility of excess, no opening can be left for the intrusion of disgust. Our serenity will be unruffled by any probable contingency of evil; undisturbed by any

anticipation of calamity. The cup of satisfaction will be full.

As this is a probationary life, we are placed in such circumstances and subjected to such a discipline, as are best adapted to promote the growth of those habits and of that disposition, which are the most essential qualifications for a state of future blessedness and incorruption. And from those habits of conduct and the nature of that disposition, which the circumstances of our present condition are expressly accommodated to encourage, and which revelation, giving force and sanctity to the unwritten declarations of nature, so authoritatively enjoins, we may form some probable conjecture about the nature of that future state, for which the righteous are designed. For we may reasonably

suppose that that state will be so circumstanced, as to require the presence and to favour the exertion of those habits and that disposition, which our previous experience in this probationary world is calculated to produce. For would they be encouraged by the constitution of our nature, and the circumstances in which we are placed; would they be enjoined by Christianity, as requisite to future happiness, if no opportunity were to be afforded for their exertion in a future state? and if the enjoyments of that state were not, in some measure, connected with their exercise? For why should our Saviour inculcate a particular disposition of mind and heart, as necessary to our happiness beyond the grave, if such a disposition were to have no existence beyond the grave? and to what purpose would it exist, if

no scope were left for its exertion? Would any wise man, well acquainted with the constitution of our nature, and the circumstances in which we were placed, enjoin us affectionately to cherish and vigorously to pursue any particular quality, as essentially conducive to our present happiness, if either the constitution of our nature, or the circumstances in which we were placed, precluded the exercise, and of course superseded the utility of the acquisition?

In a future life, we cannot indeed suppose that any individual will experience any portion or species of that indigence and distress, which now call for the exertions of our charity; which excite our compassion and stimulate our beneficence. For, in a future life, all tears will be wiped from all eyes; all

causes of anxiety and woe will be done away. But still ample opportunities for the exercise of a beneficent disposition may be afforded; for, we may naturally suppose that, in a future life, the social propensities of man, will become more active in proportion as they are more refined; and that, though every individual may be happy in himself, and have no cause of grief either within or without, the happiness of one individual may be increased by an interchange of kind offices with another, by the pure and holy effusions of mutual love. Here the social principle is under continual restraint from the selfishness of individuals, or the tyranny of political institutions; here it is, though not solely yet principally employed in the barren reciprocations of a ceremonious civility; here there is more of the show, than of

the substance of affection ; but in heaven, whence all dissimulation and hypocrisy will be banished, love will not be confined to empty protestations ; there will be the sincere and unadulterated spirit of benevolence, energetically operative in the whole Christian kingdom. And, though we know, that in heaven all will be happy, yet we also know that there will be degrees of happiness ; that one will differ from another in his portion of glory. There is also nothing improbable in supposing that the degree of knowledge may vary, as also the pursuits of intellect ; that therefore a source of happiness may be opened in the mutual communications of intelligence ; and that one individual by this and other means, may render another more happy than he would otherwise be; and as there will be this benevolent

disposition in all, the service which one will render to another will be free and gratuitous; not prompted by venal expectation or obtained by clamorous importunity.

Though, therefore, in heaven, there may be no occasion for the indulgence of that species of benevolence, which, on earth, is called compassion; because there will be no objects of misery to excite such a feeling; yet, as we know that there are to be different degrees of glory and happiness, we may be assured that opportunities will not be wanting for the exercise of a species of sympathy, which shews perhaps a more refined and exalted state of the benevolent affections; and for which we have hardly a name on earth; so rare is the virtue and so difficult the practice. With us the

word compassion almost exclusively denotes our sympathy with the sick, the indigent, the unfortunate; but our language is without a word to express our sympathy with the happy and the prosperous. In this present world, in which there is so much suffering, so much need for the exercise of compassion, it is perhaps wisely ordained that the tendencies in our nature, should be greater to sympathize with the poor than with the rich, with the unfortunate than with the prosperous, with those, who want a morsel of bread, than with those who fare sumptuously every day; that there should be in us a greater pliability of nerve, a greater natural facility to mourn with those that mourn, than to rejoice with those that do rejoice.

We all of us perhaps experience a stronger disposition, a more spontaneous readiness, to assimilate our feelings to the sorrows than to the joys of our fellow-creatures; to condole with the one than to participate with the other; to sink to the lowest depression of their spirits than to reach their highest elevation. Envy, and other feelings, very adverse to benevolence, are but too apt to vibrate on our nerves, when we see others happier, or possessed of more opulence or power than we are ourselves. We do not sufficiently consider that, by rejoicing with those that rejoice, we must, at the same time, add to our own stock of enjoyment; for, we, in some measure, render their enjoyments ours; and appropriate their happiness to ourselves. But, in heaven, where a benevolent disposition, gradually

wrought in us by the wise discipline of this probationary world, has taken deep root in our souls, and produced its full effect on our habits, when envy and every malign and selfish feeling is absorbed in the flame of love, the propensity to rejoice with those that do rejoice, expanded and matured, will be found greatly to increase the purity and sublimity of our bliss. If, therefore, in heaven, there be different degrees of happiness, the greater happiness will not excite our envy but our joy. We shall exult in spirit, giving glory to God, and breathing nothing but good-will to all around us, when we behold the highest state of glory and bliss conferred on the worthiest objects; conscious that where there is superior happiness there was superior desert; and that those, who possess it, were

the most fit objects for the possession. Those comparisons of situation, therefore, which on earth might inflame our discontent, in heaven will only produce complacency, and augment delight.

We cannot too often reflect that death will cause our re-union with the friends whom we loved; for, what idea is so fit to mitigate the regret, which we may feel on quitting the world? For, if death occasions our separation from some friends, it will only renew our acquaintance with others; and as we shall see those, who have gone before us, so we shall soon be revisited by those, whom we have left behind. Thus death itself to those, who can regard it without the terrors of a troubled conscience, is an object of the most

pleasurable expectation. It presents before us a prospect full of glory and delight. For it will not only introduce us to the company of our departed friends and acquaintance, but to that of the spirits of all the good and wise, who have ever lived in any age or country of the world. This, of itself, is a most agreeable contemplation, which may well make death rather an object of hope than of fear. And, above all, we are to consider that death will introduce us into a nearer acquaintance with the perfections of God. We shall enjoy more of the divine presence; we shall have a more full and lively experience of the divine favour and protection, perplexed by none of those doubts, encompassed by none of those clouds, which now so often depress our spirits and sadden our way.

Thus death, at least to the person who suffers it, cannot be regarded as an evil. It is indeed the termination of all evils, and the beginning of all good. Nothing is less to be dreaded or more to be desired. To the survivors, death may be a calamity. It may cause real privations and excite deep regret. It may deprive us of one, long endeared to us by every tie of affection and esteem; by many acts of reciprocal vivility and tenderness,—by the habits of free and unreserved communication,—one, in whose society we found comfort, or in whose beneficence support. Here we may find plentiful cause for our hearts to ache and our eyes to run down with tears. And, on the first shock of any such calamity, even prudence may require that we should rather freely indulge, than violently endeavour to repress the effusions of our grief.

But, as soon as the heart is relieved from the first flood of overwhelming woe, let us consider that we are mourning an event, which to the sufferer is an occasion of joy, which, if the alternative could now be proposed to him, he would not be willing to reverse; and that it is an event, which the wise disposer of all things determined, who best knows when and how to give and to take away what he gave. Instead then of grieving, we ought to rejoice. For is it not our duty to rejoice at every good thing, which happens to those whom we love; and what better thing can happen to them than to be removed from this world of woe, and to go where all tears shall be wiped from all eyes?

We are too apt to consider death as the greatest evil, instead of the greatest

good. It is the termination of all pains and the beginning of all pleasures. It is a release from a thousand vexations and uncertainties, from which even the most prosperous are not free, to a state in which there is no solicitude and woe; and where the righteous are placed far beyond the reach of malice or misfortune. If death be so great a good, it can be nothing but a false view of the subject, or the dire forebodings of a guilty conscience, that can make the event itself an object of terror and dismay.

Some dread death, as they do the amputation of a limb, or some excess of pain that is past endurance. But this arises from want of calm consideration; for though the throbs, the convulsions, and exacerbations of disease preparatory to death, may be painful,

yet the transition from life to death, mus be so rapid and inst ntaneous as to be incapable of perception. Dying has a ear resemblance to falling asleep. We pass in a moment from a state of wakefulness to a state of sleep. The precise moment when we fall asleep and when we die is not an object of the consciousness. Before we can be conscious of what death is, we have ceased to be. The tie of connection between us and this sentient frame is for ever broken.

It may perhaps be paradoxical to say, that there is no such thing as death. But, if by death we meant a total cessation of being, or extinction of the consciousness, it is plain that there is no such thing. For death is only a permanent separation of the consciousness from the organized body; it is a disso-

lution of the earthly consistence, but not of the moral consciousness, the spiritual essence of man.

Our Saviour uses this argument to refute the false opinion of the Sadducees, who thought that there were no spiritual existences, and that the material frame constituted the whole man; "God is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; now God is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live unto him;" meaning that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, though nominally dead, were still percipient objects of the divine favour and protection; which they had both life to enjoy and piety to adore. For God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; he is not an object of worship to a stock or a stone, to an inanimate carcase without feeling or perception; and, consequently, in-

sensible of favour, and incapable of gratitude and devotion. But our Saviour, by declaring of the patriarchs, who, in the popular sense of the word, had so long been dead, and whose bodies were mouldered into their kindred dust, that they were living unto God, directly asserts, that they still experienced the divine goodness, and still retained a capacity to make that goodness the object of their religious adoration. Our Lord therefore intimates that what we call death, does not destroy the consciousness, or put an end to that thinking faculty which is infused into this earthly frame, which renders us capable of discerning the attributes of the Creator in the works of his creation; by which we are enabled to distinguish good from evil; and to render to God that obedience, which is a reasonable service.

DEATH,

Philosophically, Morally, and Practically considered.

PART IV.

WE are, in general, so attached to life, that we suffer a considerable depression of spirits from every thing that reminds us of its fragility and decay. It is a sensible admonition of the uncertainty of our dearest possessions, the vanity of our fondest hopes and most sanguine expectations. But nothing can afford a more impressive and awful picture of the instability of human life, than the sight of youth and beauty buried in an untimely grave. When we behold the blooming young of either

sex cut off by the scythe of death, it not only reminds us of our own mortality, but the spectacle itself has something in it so peculiarly melancholy, that it awakens the tenderest sensibilities of our nature. To see a vigorous and healthy tree, which might have stood for centuries, the pride of the grove or the ornament of the field, furnishing a friendly shelter from the heat and from the rain, scattered by the lightning or torn from its roots by the storm; or even to see those luxuriant blossoms of the spring, which offered so fair a promise of fruit, withered and killed by some unhealthy gale, cannot but, at the moment, give a tincture of melancholy to our sensations, and a turn of sombre seriousness to our thoughts.

But deeper is the hue of woe, when we see a being, full of sensibility and

intelligence, capable of receiving and of communicating pleasure, plunged into the narrow confines of the tomb, before the faculties had disclosed the fullness of their strength, or the mind and heart had received the culture of which they were susceptible, and for which they were designed. We cannot look without regret on any thing, which, by some cruel stroke of fortune, has been prevented from answering the end for which it was designed, and attaining that degree of perfection for which it was suited by its structure or its properties. It is a sensation similar to this, which always, more or less, enters into the constitution of that distress which we feel, when we behold a being capable of lasting for threescore or fourscore years, crumbled into dust in the spring of life, while all the fair hope of expanding talents and virtues is nipped

in the bud, without being permitted to unfold. Then even those who are most marked by want of compassion, or apathy of character, can hardly help heaving a sigh of concern, or dropping a tear of woe. While we have hearts not quite callous to every touch of sympathy, can we, on such an occasion, think, without concern, of the mournful regrets of kindred and relatives, of the pangs and agonies of parents, stripped, perhaps, of the only hope and solace of their declining years? Can we refrain from commiserating their forlorn and comfortless situation, while we lament the premature end of the deceased?

But, much as the feelings of the sad survivors may interest our sympathy, to the person himself, who has received his early summons to eternity, the event

must not be regarded as an evil, but a good. For, as God is infinite in wisdom and goodness, we may be sure that no one dies, when it would be better for himself that he should live; and that no man's time of trial is too short. For God will not call men to account for more than they have received; and of those, to whom little has been given, less will proportionally be required; so that no one, in the great day of reckoning, whether he perish in infancy or in extreme old age, will have any reason to complain of the partiality or the injustice of the divine administration. If a man die in early life, we know that he, who is not a hard master, or an unequal judge, will not require of him a degree of improvement beyond his time and opportunities; and, on the same conviction of the divine benevolence, we

may be certain that he, who perishes in his youth, in a state of moral unfitness for the society of the angels in heaven, would not have been more fit, if he had lived to a more advanced period of life. But, on the contrary, it is probable, that God, foreseeing that length of life, instead of terminating in repentance and moral amendment of conduct, would only have rendered the habits of sin more obstinate and intractable, accelerated the period of death in order to prevent the accumulation of crimes. God, we know, is long-suffering, and slow to wrath; not willing that any should perish, but that all should relinquish the paths of sin for those of piety and goodness; and hence we find, that very wicked men are often treated with great indulgence, that they experience a more than ordinary share of the divine

clemency and forbearance; and that the period of their probation is protracted, till every hope of their reformation is extinguished. But to those, in whom, at an earlier period, the habit of unrighteousness is inveterate and incurable, and who are more prematurely ripe for destruction, no delay of vengeance can be due. And hence we often see them overwhelmed, in a moment, in the abyss of death! And for those, who die in a state of moral fitness for the fruition of that blessedness which is destined for the righteous, for those, whose habits, as far as they have been formed, are good, and whose conscience, as far as it has been exercised, is unpolluted with guilt, no farther stay in this probationary world can be supposed necessary; and God only shews his love by shortening the term of their

language of Scripture, "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!"

Every death, where the person was, in any degree, an object of affection and esteem, is to the survivors a subject of regret; but we may surely behold with anguish less pungent and severe, the departure of those who had passed the meridian of their days, or reached the extremity of age. When we come to a certain period of life, the pains begin to outnumber the pleasures of existence; and when a man has arrived at that period, beyond which the intellectual faculties, ceasing to advance, become retrogade, and when physical infirmities begin to overpower the moral energies of the individual, the addition of a few years to the duration of such a

life is rather to be deprecated than desired. Fruit cannot be better gathered, nor corn reaped, than when it is fully ripe; or when it has reached that state of maturation when a farther exposure to the free action of the elements tends only to diminish its quantity or to hasten its decay. And, when is a man so fit to die, so ripened for the tomb, as when all his faculties have reached their highest point of increase, when decay begins, and no farther amelioration of the mind or heart is to be expected?

After a certain period of life, sensations of pleasure, even where the physical sensibility has not been exhausted by premature and excessive gratification, becomes dull and faint by frequent repetition. The life even of those, who are commonly reputed the happiest, is

the pursuit of libidinous joys, is found most sensual in decay, it must not be supposed that the quantity of the pleasure obtained is, in any degree, proportioned to the impatience of the pursuit; for the pleasure, if any pleasure can be said to be perceived, resides more in the imagination than in the sense. It is rather a delusion than a reality; for which the person usually pays more than it is worth, in an increase of physical debility and moral dissatisfaction.

When the wicked live, as sometimes happens, to extreme old age, and in the last stage of corporeal decrepitude, when the pleasures of sin have no longer any relish, if some terrifying apprehensions of a future judgment are excited, and the person, conscious both of his error and his danger, looks with regret

and with dismay on the black catalogue of his past transgressions, can we reasonably expect, or have we any distinct assurance of scriptural authority to suppose, that, when habits of sin have been so long formed, and, contrary to every sober admonition, and to the natural sense of duty, so obstinately indulged, this transient penitence of the dying hour will avail to efface the guilt, or to avert the impending woe? For is it not a truth, enforced by reason and supported by the evidence of Scripture, that as this life is probationary, and the condition of individuals in another life will consequently have a direct relation to their conduct in this, a late repentance, which does not begin till life is about to end, is not likely entirely to exonerate the person from those pains and sufferings which, according to the

constitution of things, and the natural and apparently indissoluble connection between vice and misery, which is visible in the dispensations of Providence, and affirmed in the revelation of Christ, are the certain consequences of those habits of transgression, in which the person has persevered from youth to age? For the supposition, that a man who has persisted in habits of sin during the greater part of his life, when he was most capable of a free choice and a vigorous obedience, may be rendered happy after death, if he be convinced of his errors, and sorry for his offences, a few hours before he dies, is diametrically opposite to those clear and emphatical declarations of our Saviour, that a man shall be judged according to his works; and that he shall receive, according to what he hath done in the

body, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. The doctrine of repentance must never so be construed or explained, as to weaken the force or gainsay the truth of such express and positive assertions. We are to consider that Christians are, in respect to the advantages of moral knowledge, in very different circumstances from what the Heathen or even the Jews were, when the gospel was first preached; that to them the terms of repentance might, in some instances, be rendered more lax, or interpreted with more indulgence; and that a pardon might be vouchsafed to old and obdurate sinners among them, which it may be quite reconcileable to the perfect benevolence of the Deity to refuse to such sinners among us. For their ignorance and superstition might palliate their guilt, and extenuate their

enormities; while our superior knowledge, and clearer conviction of our duty, greatly aggravate every transgression which we commit. And certainly, the better acquainted we are with our duty, the less excusable are we when we offend. A man who is half-blind may be more readily pardoned, when he loses his way, than he who enjoys a more perfect sight; but there are very few among us who arrive at a capacity to distinguish good and evil, without the moral differences of actions, and the future consequences of a good or an evil course of life being, in some measure, awakened in our minds, and impressed upon our consciences. And those, who enter into the paths of sin, can seldom proceed far in the way to perdition without being frequently warned of their danger and urged to

repeetance, and amendment of life, by the voice of the virtuous, and the regrets of conscience. But, if, notwithstanding these repeated and moving dissuasives; if, in opposition to the gravest admonitions, and the clearest sense of duty, they will persist in sinning, to the close of life, or till they have quite exhausted every gratifieation which sin can afford, till they have satiated every unlicensed passion and every vicious propensity, can we expect that, even the agonies of repentance, in the last hour of their infirmity and decay, will avert the condemnation of HIM, who has solemnly affirmed that he will render to every man according to his works?

The example of the thief upon the cross, who was cheered with the assurance of forgiveness, when in the pangs

of death, ought not to be urged as an encouragement to dying penitents; for we must consider, that we are not at all acquainted with the many circumstances of extenuation which there might have been in the case itself, or with the peculiar disposition of the sufferer, which fitted him to be an object of such singular compassion. Perhaps the crime for which he suffered, was the first which he had ever committed, and into which he was hurried by some sudden impulse of passion, or the overbearing pressure of want, while there had been no previous depravity in the general tenor of his life, or complexion of his habits; and while his heart and affections were untainted by malevolence. There might likewise have been many grounds of palliation in his education; and he might have erred more from not knowing his duty, than from

the wilful contempt or the deliberate violation of it.—And, in short, as he might not, heretofore, have had any opportunity of being acquainted with the Christian doctrine, the circumstances of his case might have been so totally different from those, in which any of us are likely to be placed, as not to afford us any ground whatever to believe that we can safely place any trust in a late repentance; or can, without the most imminent danger, delay our moral reformation.

But, though, in the majority of cases it may not be consistent with the comprehensive benevolence of the Deity, that the penitence of a dying person, in whom the quantity of evil has greatly exceeded that of good, or whose virtues have been only like a speck, compared to the gigantic enormity or fear-

ful aggregate of his sins, should avail, so far as entirely to avert the punishment due to his past transgression; yet, it may avail to mitigate that punishment, to lessen the severity, or to shorten the duration. For he, who dies, though, in ever so faint a degree, convinced of the heinousness of sin, is certainly a more fit object of mercy, and likely to require punishment less intense and less permanent to effect his reformation, and to eradicate every remaining fibre of unrighteousness from his soul, than he, who dies without having any greater loathing or more awful dread of sin in his death, than he had in his life. Thus, therefore, though we would not willingly be the means of persuading any to rely on a late repentance, yet, we would not, at the same time, wish to lead even the most inveterate sinners, to persist in the course of evil

in which they have so long walked, to the last moment of expiring life, in despair that any remorse which they may feel, or any exertions to reform their conduct which they may make, will, in the least, avail. For, as our notions of the infinite goodness and justice of God, will never permit us to believe, that he will inflict an eternity of punishment on the temporary offences of an imperfect and short-lived creature like man, and as the expressions of scripture, when explained according to the rules of sound criticism, afford no countenance to such a supposition, we may well believe that no sensations of repentance, however faint, no efforts to amend, however imperfect, if sincere, will be overlooked, by the Father of mercies; but, as far as they tend to improve the disposition of the person, and consequently to lessen the necessity,

will serve to mitigate the severity of the punishment.

The best preparation, indeed the only safe preparation for death is a good life. For we are to consider that a good life is, as to our habits and consciousness, to be a continuation of our present. The good, the pure, the beneficent habits, which we acquire, are the qualifications, the moral fitness, for a higher state of existence, with which we are to pass into eternity. For, one season of this life is not more preparatory to another, as infancy to youth, or youth to manhood, than this whole life is preparatory to another. When then we come to die, and reflect on the state into which we are about to pass, and the particular qualifications of disposition and habit, which the gospel has enjoined as necessarily requisite for the enjoy-

ment, our only security and consolation can consist in the consciousness of having lived soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

Though habits, when once thoroughly formed, and radically established, are not often changed or destroyed, yet they sometimes are. And nothing has ever been so powerfully operative in producing such wonderful effects, and in totally altering or renewing the disposition and habits, as the Christian doctrine. We have seen instances, in which it has succeeded in effecting the most beneficial improvement in the character; changing the selfish into the benevolent; the turbulent into the gentle; the hasty and passionate into the meek and forbearing. This is that change in the interior man, the habits and affections, which shews the reality of repentance.

In the period of thoughtless and giddy youth, we often indulge in excesses, which, in more mature years we condemn; we begin to lay the foundation of habits, which we have the courage in a season of more consideration to subvert. In the hey-day of the blood, when present pleasure puts on the most winning aspect, and throws out the most fascinating lure, we perhaps readily become the victims of deception; but calmer moments arrive; the illusion is detected; our folly stares us in the face. Our breasts are racked with remorse and shame. We resolve to forsake the depravity which we had cherished; to eradicate the seeds of vice which we had sown. The divine favour, which never ceases to smile on every good endeavour, seconds our exertions; and by degrees, the power of

righteousness becomes fixed in our principles and visibly active in our lives.

And those persons who thus repent and amend, often make the best characters in after-life. They become more on their guard against temptation; they know the fair and attractive blandishments of a sensual life; they have felt how easily men may be instigated to evil by unruly appetites and impure imaginations; and they accordingly do not cease to watch and pray against so dangerous an enemy; they have experienced the deceitfulness and the misery of sin, and they become sensible of the worth, and more attached to the interests of righteousness, in which alone they are convinced true joy is to be found. When the period of death arrives, such persons, though they may

look back with deep regret and poignant dissatisfaction on that period of their lives, when they were strangers to the practice of piety and goodness, may yet reflect with unfeigned satisfaction and undisturbed complacency on that subsequent period, when their hearts became the seat of better impressions; when their minds were fearfully struck with a sense of their enormities and a consciousness of their danger; and they returned to that way in which they ought, from the beginning, to have gone. The end of these persons is full of the hope of immortality. With peace and comfort they may await the messenger of death. They are animated against all obtrusive fears, by the consciousness that, before their time of trial was over, they had deviated from that course and relinquished those ha-

bits, which, if they had persisted in them, would have proved fatal to their salvation; and they have good reason to believe, from the testimony of their past experience, from their deep sense of the misery of sin, and their thorough conviction that true happiness consists in regulating the mind, the affections, and the conduct, by the precepts of religion, that, if their lives had been prolonged, the force of their virtuous inclinations would have increased; and that they would have made continual advances in the way of righteousness.

Nothing can better shew the different nature of virtue and vice, of moral good and moral evil, or more impressively demonstrate the different degree of estimation in which they ought to be

held, or the different degree of regard which they deserve, than the different effects which a virtuous or vicious course of life is calculated to produce, and seldom fails of producing, at that trying hour, when the world and all its interests are found to be vain and perishable things. The sinner looks with dismay on what is past, and tremblingly expects what is to come. Then he loaths most what, perhaps, *till then*, he had most desired; the lusts of sensuality in which he had revelled, the gay and unprincipled debaucheries which he had practised, the honours and possessions which he had acquired by base and immoral arts, by the sacrifice of integrity or the neglect of benevolence, appear to him more hideous and revolting than the silence and corruption of the grave, into which he is

so soon to descend. But on the contrary, at that most awful crisis, the pure. the benevolent, and the upright, look back with joy, and forward with hope. They see the grave opening to receive their mortal remains, but they behold the sunshine of everlasting life beyond the abyss of death. They deposit in the tomb only the inferior part of themselves, the seat of debility, of suffering, and disease; but the spirit, freed from this incumbrance, hails the hour of its deliverance, and passes into a state of imperishable glory.

At the hour of death, nothing but those actions which were agreeable to the sense of duty are then found to furnish a subject of pleasurable recollection. Even in this life, those only enjoy that inward satisfaction, which no

gold can purchase, and no power procure, who adhere to that rule of right which is planted in their consciences, and ratified by the Christian doctrine. This inward satisfaction is always found to be the reward of virtuous action, of truth, justice, and humanity; and which fraud, injustice, and cruelty, never can produce. But when we come to die, how sweet and cheering is the recollection of a well-spent life! while the breast of the sinner, which even in the vigour of health, and the height of prosperity, was not a place of rest or a haven of delight, must be tempested with trouble, and filled with dismay. Then the apprehensions of punishment, which, even in a calmer period, the pleasures of sin and the riot of a sensual life could never stifle, become more strong, in proportion as the reality is brought more near.

There are few persons who would not be happier on the bed of death than they usually are, if they would seriously ask themselves, before they pursue any pleasure which is forbidden, or do any act which conscience disapproves, in what light their conduct will appear when they come to die? Shall I not feel that that, which, in the folly of my heart, I now deem a gain, was really a loss; and that, which now, misled by my sensual lusts and appetites, I deem the highest gratification, was really the greatest pain which I could incur? In what estimation shall I then hold the tricks which I now employ to get rich, the extortion, the injustice, the selfishness, which I practise? Will they not be the bane of my peace, the torment of my soul? That present interest, which now so dazzles the sight, that ephemeral pleasure, that evanescent

joy, which is now found so strong an incentive to disobedience, will then be past; and we shall wonder that we could ever be so unwise, as to suffer them to hurry us into the perpetration of enormities so adverse to our greatest good, so destructive of true tranquillity and happiness.

By thus anticipating the judgment which we shall pass on our own conduct, when we come to die, we shall more forcibly feel the necessity of living soberly, righteously, and godly, before death; and shall thus escape the condemnation of our own hearts at that awful hour; and the condemnation of our Lord at the resurrection of the dead.

Sensual delights and temporal enjoyments have, from the very constitution

of our nature, and the circumstances in which we are placed, such a sway over us, that though it may be easy to act uprightly, when we have no temptation to do the contrary, and to keep, without any deviation, in the line of duty, as long as it happens to run parallel with our worldly interest, yet the difficulty is seen, and the man is tried, when his duty and his interest are at variance; when hunger and thirst, or cold and nakedness, are the consequence of the performance; when he cannot speak truth without forfeiting some great pleasure or emolument, or do what is strictly just without the loss of affluence, or the privation of the comforts and conveniences of life. In these cases nothing can act as a stay to integrity, or keep us from falling, but the most serious consideration, and the most lively sense of the weighty inte-

rests of religion and morality. In such a conflict of sensations and desires, so opposite and contradictory, a man should endeavour to view every violation of duty in that light in which he certainly will view it, when the casual gratifications with which it was associated are at an end; and particularly at that period when life itself is near a close; and when he will see that there never was, nor is, nor can be, any real interest apart from righteousness; and that every loss to which a strict adherence to the precepts of the Christian doctrine may expose us, is a benefit, every pain a pleasure, every privation a delight.

FINIS.

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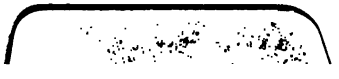
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